



U.S. Department of Justice

CHANNING D. PHILLIPS
*Acting United States Attorney for the
District of Columbia*

*Judiciary Center
555 Fourth St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20530*

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For Information Contact:

Public Affairs

(202) 514-6933

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Local Man Pleads Guilty to Paying Gratuity as Part of Conspiracy to Obtain Facially Valid, but Fraudulent, District Driver's Licenses for Foreign Nationals

WASHINGTON - A 35-year-old District man, Castulo Hernandez, has pleaded guilty to paying a gratuity to a former employee of the D.C. Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in exchange for facially valid, but fraudulently obtained, District of Columbia drivers' licenses for foreign nationals, Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips, Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, and D.C. Inspector General Charles Willoughby announced today. Hernandez is scheduled to be sentenced on March 11, 2010, and faces a maximum sentence of two years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 under the statute.

Hernandez pleaded guilty earlier today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before the Honorable Richard J. Leon to a one-count Information charging payment of a gratuity to a public official. In pleading guilty, Hernandez admitted that on June 27, 2007, he paid DMV employee Patricia Gonzalez (Gonzalez) \$300 to renew his District of Columbia driver's license even though he no longer legally resided in the United States. Hernandez was introduced to Gonzalez by Gloria Gonzalez Paz (Paz), whose husband was an acquaintance of Hernandez. In July 2007, Hernandez began referring other foreign nationals to Paz so that they could obtain facially valid drivers' licenses from Gonzalez. Most of these individuals were not eligible to obtain such driver's licenses because they did not reside in the District of Columbia or were not legally present within the U.S. Further, many of these individuals were unable to read in either English or Spanish and, therefore, were unable to pass the knowledge and road skills tests. Paz received money from these foreign nationals whom Hernandez referred to Paz and paid Gonzalez on average \$500 for every fraudulent license Gonzalez issued. Hernandez received payment of \$300 from some of the foreign nationals whom he referred to Paz. In total, Hernandez facilitated the procurement of at least seven fraudulent driver's licenses from Gonzalez.

Previously, on May 19, 2008, Gonzalez entered a guilty plea to a one-count Information, charging her with receipt of a bribe by a public official. During the plea, Gonzalez admitted that she issued approximately 200 fraudulent driver's licenses. The recipients of those licenses did not complete an application or present complete documentation, verifying their names, dates of birth, social security

numbers, District of Columbia residency, or legal presence in the U.S. In order to issue the licenses, Gonzalez admitted entering false information into DMV's computer system and using her override authority where the computer system's internal controls rejected the data. For example, if the social security number Gonzalez entered failed to verify because it did not match the name or date of birth entered or was invalid, she overrode the system and falsely asserted in a comment box that the customer had presented a verification letter from the Social Security Administration. If a customer did not possess a social security number, Gonzalez often entered "000-00-0000" and made a false comment entry that a social security number verification was not required. With respect to the requirement of legal presence in the U.S., Gonzalez falsely entered that many of these individuals were U.S. citizens. For others, she elevated an individual's status to Permanent Resident, extended the expiration date of the individual's legal status significantly to avoid the requirement that a D.C. driver's license expire on the date of expiration of legal status, and fraudulently extended the expiration date of the driver's license to the maximum period permitted by law, that is, the individual's last birthday within five years from the date the driver's license was issued. Gonzalez bypassed the knowledge and road skills examination requirements by falsely entering data in the computer system that the foreign national possessed a valid out-of-state or foreign driver's license, inputting bogus test results, or adding a comment that the system that verified the test results was down.

On August 14, 2008, Gonzalez was sentenced to 18 months in prison for her role in the bribery scheme. Paz pled guilty to bribing a public official before Judge Leon on May 13, 2008. On August 12, 2008, Paz was sentenced to 24 months in prison. Another individual, Salvador Diaz (Diaz), who, similar to Paz, brought foreign nationals to Gonzalez to obtain fraudulent, but facially valid, driver's licenses, pled guilty to bribing a public official before Judge Leon on June 20, 2008. On October 15, 2008, Diaz was sentenced to 21 months in prison.

Twenty-three of those individuals who obtained fraudulent driver's licenses have also pled guilty. Each of these individuals pled guilty to a local D.C. charge of misdemeanor fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 180 days in prison and a fine of \$1,000. Most of these individuals have been sentenced and received a suspended prison sentence and a 12 to 36-month period of probation. Some are awaiting sentencing.

In announcing the guilty pleas, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillips, FBI Assistant Director in Charge Persichini, and Inspector General Willoughby commended the investigatory work of FBI Special Agents of the Washington Field Office and D.C. OIG Special Agent Teddy Clark. They also praised Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ellen Chubin Epstein and Susan B. Menzer, who are prosecuting the case.

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